

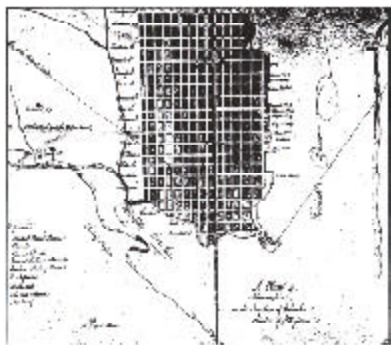
## A. HISTORY OF OPEN SPACE IN ALEXANDRIA



Market Square (from "A Guide to Historic Alexandria" by William Seale, originally from the Alexandria Library, Special Collections)



Aerial view of old town Alexandria looking up King Street c.1920 (from "A Guide to Historic Alexandria" by William Seale, originally from the Alexandria Library, Special Collections)



Plan of Alexandria (from "A Guide to Historic Alexandria" by William Seale, originally from the Library of Congress)

The only open space originally planned for community use in Alexandria was Market Square. However, a number of informal open spaces were in existence throughout Alexandria in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Some of these "commons" were used for grazing cows, horses, and other livestock. Other open spaces were strictly for human use, and were known as "pleasure gardens." The most famous of these was Spring Garden, located on the northwest corner of Wilkes and Payne Streets. Alexandrians gathered here for entertainment and summer theater; George Washington himself attended a reception at Spring Garden in 1799 commemorating the 23<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of American independence.

Much of the open space in the original grid plan for Alexandria was intended for private use. With many of the houses and other structures sited directly on the street, without any setback, open space "dependencies" were located at the rear of these properties. This pattern of development has established the character of Old Town through the present day.

Other popular open spaces and pleasure gardens in the early days of Alexandria included Yeates' Garden (on Franklin between Royal and Pitt Streets), Broomilaw Point (on South Washington Street near the present-day Hunting Towers Apartments), Old Ice House Hill (on the east side of the 700 block of Lee Street), and Battery Rodgers (located on Lee Street between Jefferson and Green Streets). Battery Rodgers was, in fact, a Civil War fort that overlooked the Potomac River. It was used as a gathering place for citizens to watch parades of Union soldiers that occupied Alexandria during the war.

One of the most picturesque, and well-known, open spaces in the city was Windmill Hill, which [like the present-day park of the same name] overlooked the Potomac River between Gibbon and Wilkes Streets. Windmill Hill became the scene of many political debates and rallies after the war. In the later days of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it became a fashionable place for Alexandrians to promenade during the warm summer months (Alexandria Gazette, 7/21/1890). It remained a popular place for festivities into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. After Charles Lindbergh flew his famous solo flight to Paris in 1927, he returned to the U.S. and made an excursion to Washington aboard the U.S.S. Memphis. On Saturday, June 11<sup>th</sup>, when the Memphis passed by Alexandria, a presidential 21-gun salute boomed out from Windmill Hill to welcome the American hero. (Alexandria Gazette, 6/11/1927). (Windmill Hill was eventually deeded to the city as a park).

An effort was also made to establish a city-owned park at Shuter's Hill in honor of George Washington. This site, at the western end of King Street overlooking Old Town (at the site of the present-day George Washington Masonic Memorial), was used often by the people of Alexandria as a gathering spot and vantagepoint. However, efforts to establish Alexandria's first public park were unsuccessful, and the site was eventually purchased in 1921



Alexandria, Virginia, 1853 (from "A Guide to Historic Alexandria" by William Seale, originally from the Alexandria Library, Special Collections)



Occupying Yankees outside the Athenaeum (from "A Guide to Historic Alexandria" by William Seale, originally from the Library of Congress)



Daily life c.1890 (from "A Guide to Historic Alexandria" by William Seale, originally from William Francis Smith Collection)

by the George Washington Masonic Memorial Committee. The structure itself was completed in 1932.

While there were a number of open spaces available to the people of the city, many of these were located outside the immediate boundaries of Alexandria and, therefore, did not provide relief in the daily lives of the city's citizens. In an 1851 editorial that appeared in the Alexandria Gazette, a citizen wrote, "... We hope in the improvements that we trust are to take place in town the project of securing some square, as a park or promenade ground for the public, will not be overlooked. Our gardens and river banks are delightful, but they are not enough." (Alexandria Gazette, 6/14/1851).

A similar sentiment was expressed in an 1882 Alexandria Gazette article that had originally appeared in the pages of the Washington Star: "... it is on days that draw the whole population out to enjoy the fresh air that the want of open squares, parks, or anything of that kind is felt. The trees and herbage then draw hundreds to the graveyard, not to be buried, but to enjoy the open air and the green grass, and catch a glimpse of the shining creek that flows by. There are no breathing places for children in the town. Fortunately now the edges are easily reached but if the town should grow much this deficiency would become unbearable. Even the court house lot planted with trees would be better than nothing..." (Alexandria Gazette, 11/18/1882)

It was not until 1948, almost 200 years after the founding of Alexandria that the city recreation department planned to build its first official park. Although by this time there were 15 operating playgrounds in the city, there still were no parks. This new park, which was planned for seven acres running from St. Asaph Street to Fairfax Street and bounded by Montgomery and First Streets, was never constructed, the reasons for which remain elusive.

It was, therefore, not until the later half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that Alexandria began to establish its system of public parks. While the city now boasts an impressive collection of 127 parks ranging in size from several acres to almost fifty acres, it is still, in many ways, struggling against the history of a city where land was too valuable a commodity to be used as open space. While the City has come a long way in creating a livable, green community for its residents, it must still buck the trends of history to provide enough open space for future generations of Alexandrians.

### B. ADMINISTRATION OF ALEXANDRIA'S PUBLIC OPEN SPACE

The vast majority of publicly owned open spaces and parks in the City of Alexandria are planned, maintained, and operated by the Department of Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities. The department is responsible for providing these facilities, along with programmed activities, for a broad range of city residents from infants to senior citizens, including those with special needs. The full range of departmental duties includes: maintenance of all

parks, ballfields, and publicly-owned flower beds in the City; tree care on public land; right-of-way maintenance; park planning and design; and the provision of organized activities such as games, sports, arts, crafts, hobbies, music, drama, and dancing.

The Department of Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities currently maintains 127 parks totaling approximately 840 acres, with a staff of approximately 500 full-time, part-time, and seasonal employees. The department itself is broken down into three functional groups that represent its major program areas: 1) Administration; 2) Program Operations; and 3) Parks, Natural Resources, and Capital Projects.

Activities of the Administration division include strategic planning; development and execution of the department's budget; financial management of the department's revenue; general contract oversight and cooperation with outside contractors; coordination of personnel actions including hiring, recruitment, and payroll processing; and information technology planning and system maintenance.

The Program Operations division is responsible for the operation of all recreation centers, including Chinguapin Park Recreation Center and Dr. Oswald Durant Memorial Center, playgrounds, camps, athletic programs, therapeutic recreation programs, senior programs, special events, park rentals, cultural arts programs, and the Alexandria Commission for the Arts.

The Parks, Natural Resources, and Capital Projects division is in charge of many departmental functions. Perhaps the most visible of these functions are the repair and maintenance of all City parks, equipment, and facilities. The division is also responsible for designing park improvements; coordinating playground renovations; implementing the Bike Trails Master Plan (with the Department of Transportation and Environmental Services); and designing, planting, and maintaining horticultural sites in street medians and public areas. There is also an arborist staff that oversees the planting and care of street trees. Lastly, a Capital Projects staff plans and coordinates the Department's capital improvements and oversees the City's marina.

All of the work that is done by the Department of Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Affairs is overseen by an eleven-member Alexandria Park and Recreation Commission. The Commission is an advisory committee that was created by the Alexandria City Council in March 1970 to study issues relating to park, recreation, and open space needs. Nine citizens are appointed to the Commission by City Council; they represent the three planning districts in the City. Two members are of high school age and are appointed to the Commission to represent the youth of Alexandria.

The Commission provides policy advice to City Council and offers City of Alexandria residents an opportunity to participate in planning activities. In addition to monitoring and making recommendations to improve the function



and diversity of existing and future recreation and park programs, the Commission works on issues pertaining to open space and advises City Council on all of these issues.

### C. EARLIER PARK AND OPEN SPACE PLANNING EFFORTS

The first parks and recreation master plan for Alexandria was adopted in 1978 as one element of the City's master plan. The master plan was updated in 1992, and contained broad goals and objectives for parks and open space; it did not, however, address a specific open space plan. Thus, the current effort represents the City's first opportunity in 24 years to adopt a comprehensive park and open space plan.

The park and open space goals adopted in the 1992 master plan included:

- Providing a park and recreation system to serve all population sectors.
- Preserving and enhancing the natural and "developed amenities" of existing public open spaces, and adding "publicly accessible open space by creative and innovative ways."
- Integrating open space into the fabric of the City.
- Protecting remaining City open space and increasing the ratio of open space per capita.
- Encouraging the provision in new developments of both active and passive open space and recreational facilities.

In addition, the 1992 master plan called for the development of a "park system plan" that would define the types of open spaces to be provided throughout Alexandria, including "a park stream valley system to provide continuous linkage and access to recreational facilities."

The current plan acknowledges the framework established by these earlier efforts while, at the same time, recognizing the changing context resulting from the past decade. The overall goal, however, remains the same: to provide Alexandrians with exceptional open spaces and recreation opportunities, while protecting and restoring the natural environment, historic fabric, and sense of community that make Alexandria a special place to live, work and visit.

### D. DEFINING AND CLASSIFYING OPEN SPACE

Citizens and policy makers mistakenly assume that the term "open space" clearly communicates an image that is shared by everyone. However, this is likely not the case. Many people, and many jurisdictions, impart a wide range of meanings to this phrase. For some, the term implies any area that does not contain a building or other structure; for others it means a "park" and nothing else; and so on. At the outset of the process of developing an open space plan for the City of Alexandria, the first task was to establish a working defini-

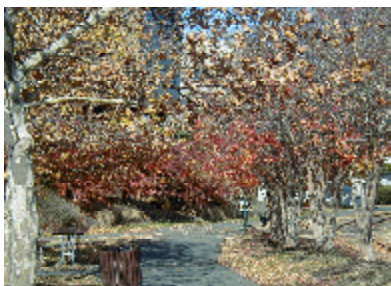
tion of “open space” that could help establish a direction for plan development.

In the process of defining those “open spaces,” to be included in the plan, the Steering Committee and consultant team concluded that the City has a complex system of significant “open space” areas that include parks, plazas, stream valleys, trails, easements, riverfront areas, streetscapes and so on. The group further decided that all of these areas made significant contributions to the overall character and livability of the City, and that a logical categorization of open spaces would be helpful in developing a plan. The resulting Open Space Classification System is based on factors of purpose or use, overall characteristics, area served, ownership status, and maintenance responsibility.

The subcategories that help to differentiate the variety of open spaces in the City are as follows:

### 1. *Primary Use*

- **Active:** Typically encompasses more heavily programmed and organized activities, such as athletic activities, dog parks and other intensive programs.
- **Passive:** Primarily consists of less structured and less formal activities. Examples include: tot lots, picnic areas, historic/cultural sites, amphitheatres and natural resource areas.
- **Trails:** Open space corridors for conservation, recreation and alternative transportation; linear systems that may occur by streams and rivers, storm water corridors, utility corridors, abandoned rail lines, sidewalks and street medians. Trails are used for hiking, biking, walking, running, transportation, recreation, wildlife corridors, and heritage resource connections.
- **Streetscapes / Scenic Roadways:** Can include boulevards, medians, plazas, sidewalks, interchanges, street trees and plantings that contribute significantly to the City of Alexandria’s green space.



Trails at Oronoco Bay Park

### 2. *Secondary Characteristics*

- **Cultural / Historical:** Sites of historic, archaeological and/or cultural interest.
- **Dog Exercise Area & Dog Park:** Spaces that are primarily dedicated to dog related activities. These include:
  - **‘Dog Exercise Areas’:** Areas of open space set aside for the specific use of dog owners/handlers to allow dogs to be off-lead. The city may provide posted rules, defined boundaries, covered trash receptacles/pick up bags, and shade where possible.
  - **‘Fenced Dog Parks’:** Fenced areas set-aside for dog owners/handlers to allow their dogs to be off-lead. The city may pro-



Streetscape on King Street and Saint Asaph



Potomac river shoreline

- vide covered trash receptacles/pick up bags, posted rules, fencing and gates, water if feasible, and shade where possible.
- **Educational:** School sites, other educational facilities, and/or interpretive areas.
- **Environmentally Sensitive:** Areas with natural resource value that are protected by regulation. Examples include: wetlands, riparian areas, streams, rivers and riverbeds, 100-year floodplains, Resource Protection Areas (RPA's), slopes of greater than twenty-five percent, critical habitat and areas of endangered species.
- **Natural Resource Areas:** Including woodlands, habitat areas, streams, rivers, riparian areas, wetlands, RPA's and greenways. Activities may encompass passive recreational pursuits such as picnicking, fishing, boating and trail related activities.
- **Recreational:** Comprises areas with playing fields, courts, playgrounds, water sports or other active recreational activities.
- **Rivers and Streams:** Includes the Potomac River and its shoreline, major streams and streambanks, RPA's, and floodplains.
- **Urban Plaza /Streetscape:** Typically hardscaped/paved spaces that contribute to the open space character in the City. They typically provide for public access, circulation and gathering activities.

### 3. Service Area

- **Regional:** Natural, cultural or recreational attractions that draw users from beyond the City. Typically these areas are part of a larger open space network which goes beyond the City boundaries. Examples of programs may include athletic fields and courts, natural areas, swimming pools, fishing access, walking and biking trails. Parks included in this category generally have self-contained parking.
- **Citywide:** Contain programs that appeal to local interests and draw people from the City as a whole. Uses may include athletic fields, athletic courts, natural areas, pools, recreation centers, walking and biking trails. Recreational facilities included in this category typically have on- and off-site parking.
- **Neighborhood:** Multi-use facilities oriented to the surrounding neighborhood. These parks are most likely to include: garden plots, multi-purpose fields, picnic grounds and shelters, playgrounds, dog areas, small natural areas, and school fields and paths which reinforce the connections between the schools and the neighborhoods. These areas typically include a limited amount of on-site parking.
- **Block:** Intended to meet the needs of residents within a one or two block area. May include seating areas, landscaping and small-scale play equipment. Typically, these areas do not have on-site parking.



Mount Vernon Recreation Center

### 4. Ownership:

- **Public:** Owned by a governmental entity such as the City of Alexandria, Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority, the Commonwealth of Virginia or the Federal Government (e.g., National Park Service). Public use and access are assured through public ownership.
- **Private with Public Access:** Private ownership with limited or unlimited public access.
- **Private with no Public Access:** Significant open spaces, the primary public value of which is to contribute to the visual benefit of the City; with no public access.
- **Private with Traditional Public Access:** Including areas of common usage and/or access, though with no guarantee of such.

#### 5. *Maintenance:*

Includes the entity or individual with the primary responsibility for the upkeep, maintenance and protection of open space areas:

- **City of Alexandria:** Maintained by the City.
- **NVRPA:** Owned and/or maintained by the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority.
- **Commonwealth of Virginia:** Highway and interchange properties that are maintained by the Virginia Department of Transportation.
- **Federal Government:** Owned and/or maintained by a Federal Government entity, such as the National Park Service.
- **Private:** Owned, operated and maintained privately.

Open spaces in the City can be classified according to the above categories. For example, Cameron Run Regional Park would be classified in the following way: primarily active, recreational in character, serving a regional area, publicly owned, and maintained by the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority. On the other hand, Angel Park, located between Janney's Lane and Duke Street, adjacent to Taylor Run, would be classified as primarily passive, possessing both recreational and natural resource area characteristics, serving a neighborhood area, publicly owned and maintained by the City of Alexandria. By using this classification system to categorize the open space areas in the City, one can begin to comprehend the extent of those that are used for active versus passive use, the acreage that is used for primarily recreational purposes, the extent and location of the City's environmentally sensitive areas, and so on. This type of classification system provides the City with a useful analytical tool for understanding and working with existing open space areas, and defining the kinds of new open space areas that may need to be added to its inventory. It also provides a "snapshot" of the open space areas that may be at risk for future development. A matrix, listing the most significant open space areas in the City of Alexandria, classified according to this system, is provided in the Appendix.

A summary table of open space areas, broken down by the "active" and "passive" use classification categories, is included below for each of the City's



three Park Planning Districts (see Figure 2 for Park Planning District boundaries). A discussion of the issues related to distribution of open space throughout Alexandria can be found in Chapter 3. Open Space Needs and Issues.

**Figure 1. Summary Table of Alexandria's Open Spaces by Active and Passive Use Classification Categories**

Category	District 1	District 2	District 3	Citywide
<b>Primary Use</b>	<b>(acres)</b>	<b>(acres)</b>	<b>(acres)</b>	<b>(acres)</b>
Active	121	155	214	490
Passive	183 *	76	183	442
Totals	304	231	397	932**

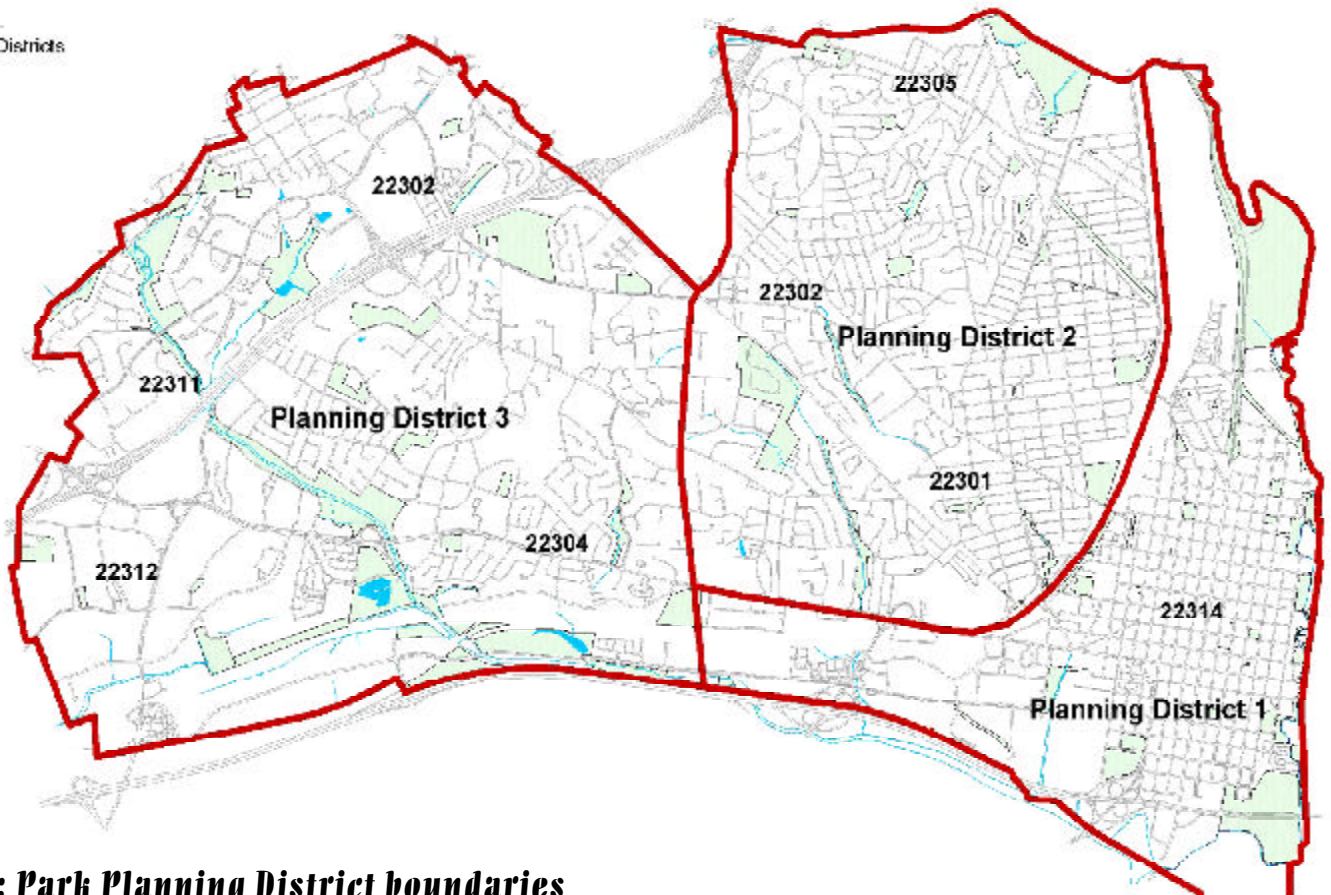
\*Includes 107 acres for primarily passive use at Daingerfield Island Park (National Park Service)

\*\*Note: This total acreage differs from that calculated by the city in 1998 (964 acres) since the City's data included a private parcel in its calculations. The 932 acres also includes several smaller public open spaces not included in the 1998 list.

## E. OPEN SPACE INVENTORY

All of Alexandria's existing open spaces were inventoried, based on the classification system described above. The results of this process are summarized in Figures 3 to 9, and are described briefly below.

Legend  
 Planning Districts



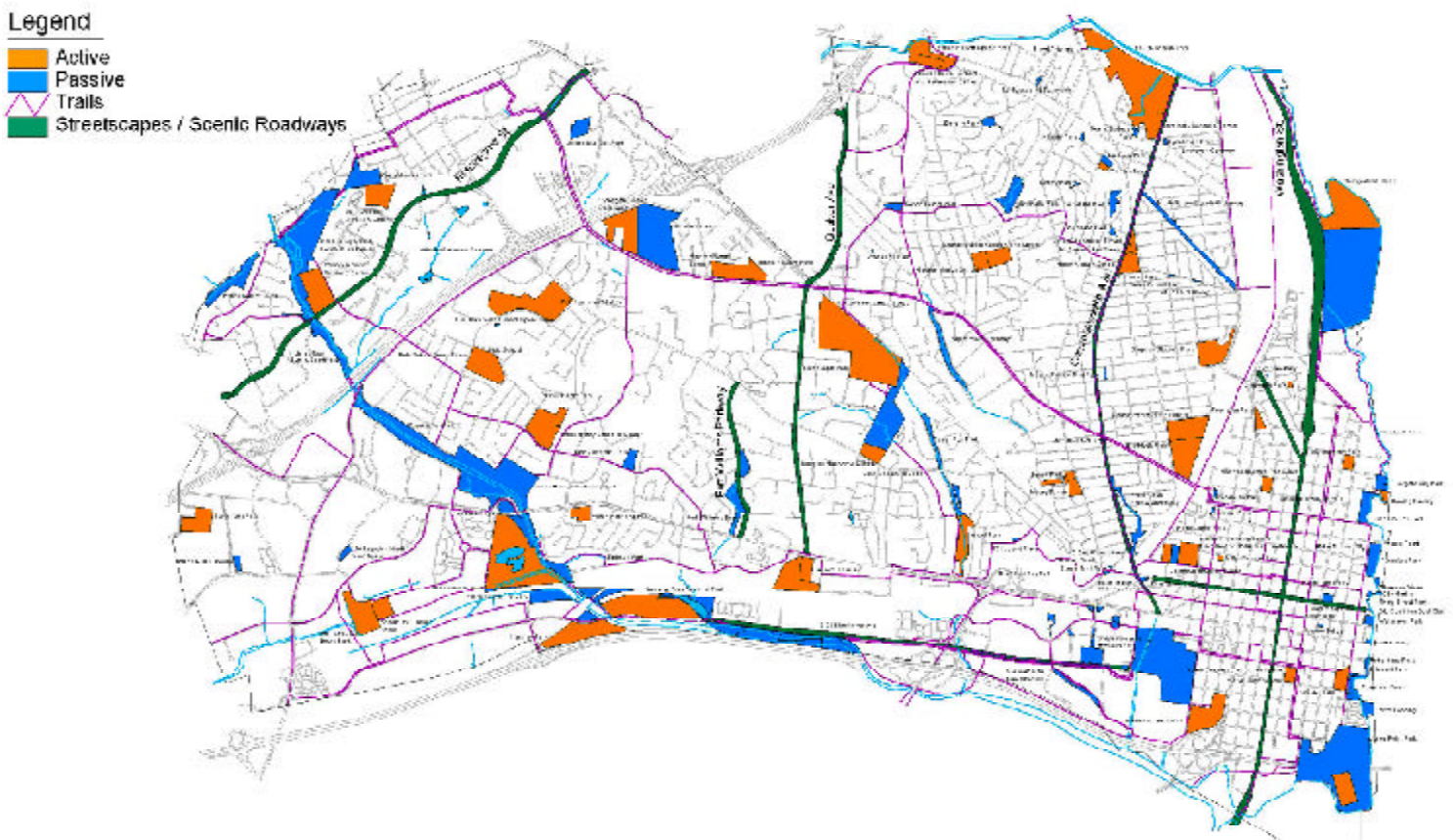
**Figure 2: Park Planning District boundaries**



- **Primary Use Areas**

It is evident from Figure 3. Primary Uses, that many of the city's open space areas are small. In fact, for public open spaces, the average size of active open space areas is less than seven acres with many sites less than one acre. Alexandria's largest active parks include Four Mile Run Park (55.9 acres, including all active fields, trails and natural resource areas), Ben Brenman Park (50.37 acres, including active facilities and natural resource areas, Jones Point Park (52.3 acres, including active fields, trails, and natural areas; leased from the National Park Service), and Chinquapin Park (23 acres of active fields and courts). The City's larger passive open spaces are, in general, environmentally sensitive sites, natural resource areas, or cultural/historic sites. These larger areas include: Daingerfield Island Park (107 acres; owned and maintained by the National Park Service), Holmes Run and Dora Kelly Nature Park (46 acres), and Fort Ward Park (41.4 acres).

In addition, Figure 3 also illustrates that the pattern of open space in Alexandria is scattered throughout the City, with few linkages between open space areas. This disconnected quality of the open space in Alexandria, combined with the small overall size of many sites, provides an impression of a City that is not very "green," and does not have a significant amount of usable open space to offer its residents and visitors. While



**Figure 3: Primary Use**

this is would be an incorrect conclusion, the City could do more to maximize the utility and appreciation of its open space areas.

- **Secondary Characteristics**

The classification system lists eight possible secondary characteristics for Alexandria's open space areas: sites of cultural and/or historic interest, dog parks and exercise areas, sites that provide educational opportunities, environmentally sensitive areas, natural resource areas, sites dedicated primarily to recreational pursuits, sites along rivers and streams, and urban plazas and/or streetscapes. An open space may represent one or more of these characteristics; in fact, some spaces can be classified as having five or more. An example of this would be Windmill Hill Park, which can be considered cultural/historic, riverfront, urban plaza, environmentally sensitive, and recreational.

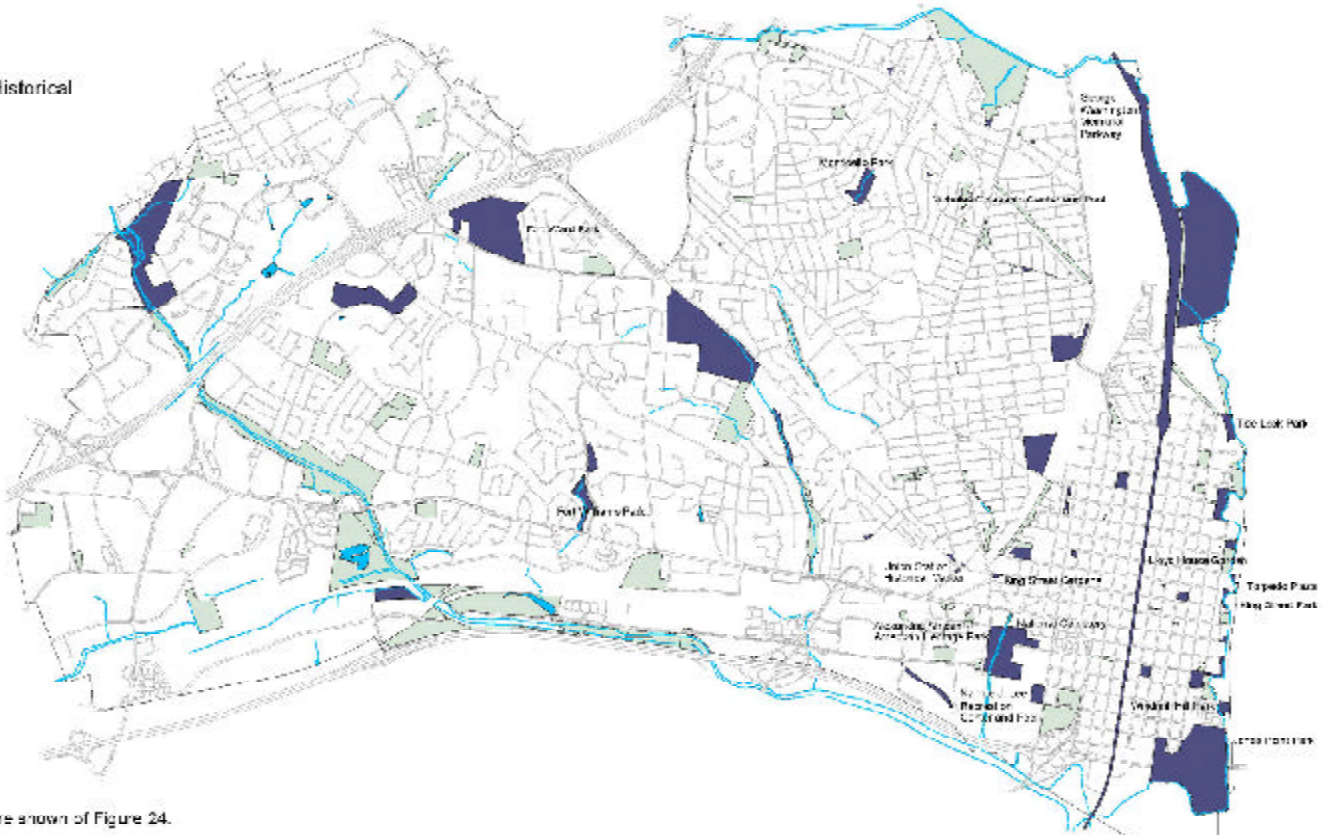


King Street historical streetscape in Old Town, Alexandria

- **Cultural/Historic Sites:** It is not surprising in a City that prides itself on its cultural and historic heritage that Alexandria should contain many open space sites that reflect that legacy. Several of these sites are, in fact, among the City's largest open space areas: for example, Fort Ward Park, Chinquapin Park, Daingerfield Island Park, Jones Point Park, and Dora Kelly Park. For each of these cultural and historic sites, it is important for the City to provide interpretive opportunities so that

## Legend

- Streams
- Cultural / Historical
- Parks



Note: Cemeteries are shown on Figure 24.

**Figure 4: Cultural/ Historic Sites**





Fort Ward amphitheater



Fenced dog park

residents can understand, value, and protect these areas.

- ***Dog Exercise Areas and Dog Parks:*** Alexandria provides two types of dog-related open space areas – dog exercise areas and fenced dog parks. While these are scattered throughout the City, the eastern half of Alexandria contains the greatest number of such facilities – particularly in Old Town.
- ***Educational Sites:*** This category includes school sites – reflecting on the importance of open space in the learning process – and open spaces with interpretive opportunities. The City’s largest open space areas connected to schools include: T.C. Williams High School (16 acres), Polk School (12 acres with its adjacent park), and Ramsey School and Recreation Center (18 acres). However, the average school open space is 4.5 acres; if you eliminate T.C. Williams High School from the calculation, the average school open space is only 3.7 acres. Most of the non-school related open space sites that currently provide some level of interpretation/education are those within either historic or environmental contexts. Many of the City’s open space areas within these categories, however, do not currently offer interpretive/learning opportunities.
- ***Environmentally Sensitive Sites:*** These are areas that are protected

## Legend

- Dog Exercise Areas & Dog Parks
- Parks



**Figure 5: Dog Exercise Areas and Dog Parks**





Holmes Run



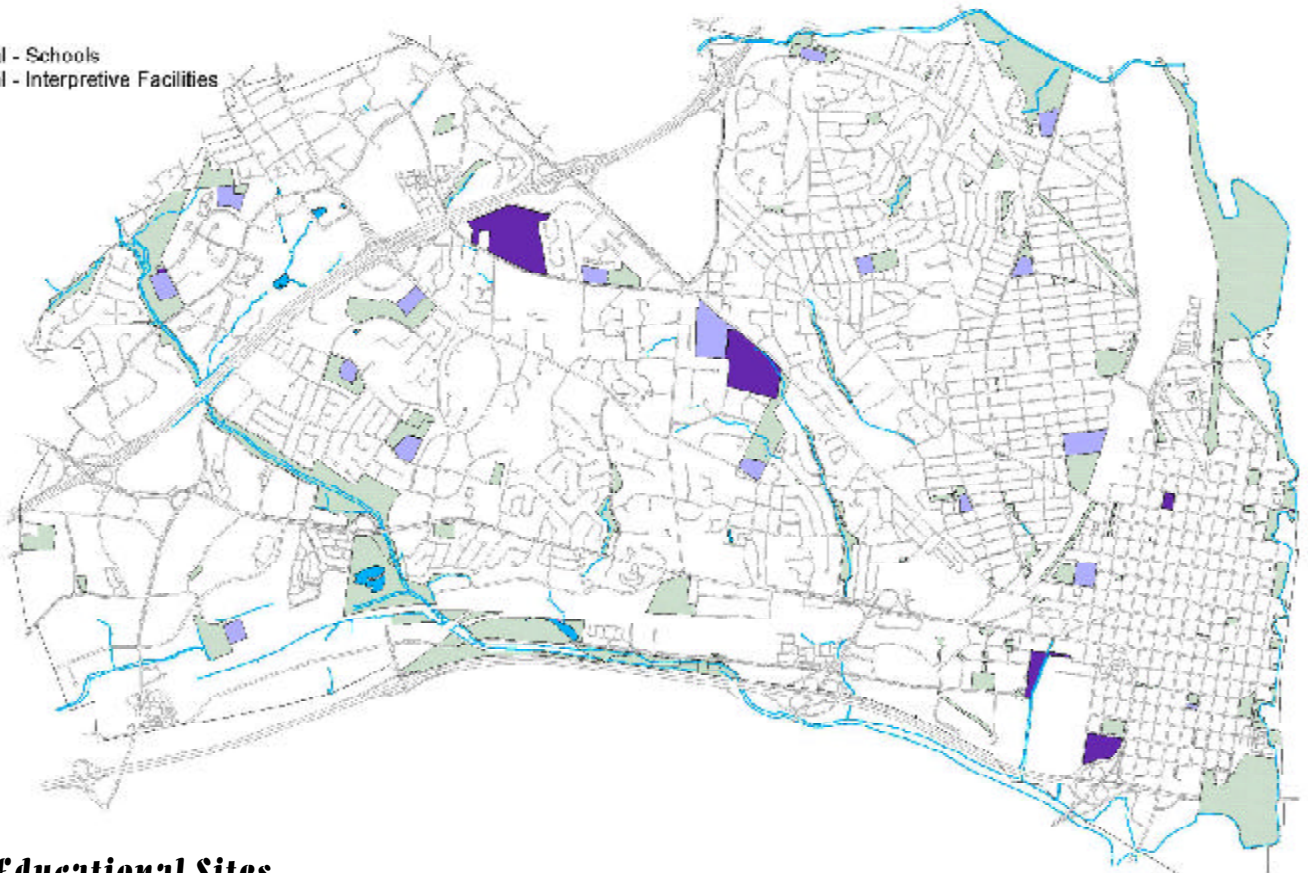
Cameron Run

through environmental regulations and include wetlands, riparian areas, streams, rivers, 100-year floodplains, RPA's, significant vegetation, slopes greater than 25 percent, critical habitat and areas of endangered species. Some of the larger sites included under this category include the Potomac River shoreline, Four Mile Run, Holmes Run, Cameron Run, and the Dora Kelly/Ramsey School sites. There are excellent interpretive opportunities at these sites to make people aware of their sensitive status and possible actions for continued stewardship.

- **Natural Resource Areas:** These include areas that, while not under regulatory controls, are still important environmental resources for the City. They include woodlands, streams, wetlands, and greenways. The City contains many important natural resource areas, with some of the largest including Chinquapin Park, Fort Ward Park, Daingerfield Island Park and Jones Point Park. It is a goal of this Plan to encourage the City to strive to continue adding sites to its natural resource areas inventory as they are identified.
- **Recreational Sites:** Recreational open space is often thought of simply as athletic fields; however, it includes a much broader range of opportunities. In addition to fields, recreational open space includes: courts, playgrounds, facilities for water sports, and so on. Figure 9 illustrates

## Legend

- Educational - Schools
- Educational - Interpretive Facilities
- Parks



**Figure 6: Educational Sites**